



together

Parish Day Out | Who's Who? Marlyn Firth | Reading Group

Orkney Islands Kirk Session

1st October will mark two years since the union came into existence. All local worshipping communities appointed up to two representative elders from their midst to serve on the Orkney Islands Kirk session for a period of two years. It is now time to review the appointment and either reappoint the existing elders for another two years or choose new representatives. This doesn't apply to Firth who joined us later. Please contact Margaret Sutherland (depute.clerk@orkneyparish.org.uk) with your appointments. Thank you

Two months in one

To allow The Team to enjoy the Shows and holiday time, this Together covers two months, not one. Copy date for the next edition is 15th September. Items please to rosemarymoon@mac.com

Please pray for...

- Orkney's farmers
- The bereaved
- Young people, especially changing schools/college

Parish Day Out to Stronsay

When? Sunday 2nd August - all day

Why? To be together as a Parish to worship in a special church - the Moncur Memorial Church.

How do I get there? The Stronsay ferry leaves the North Isles Pier in Kirkwall at 08.40, returning from Stronsay at 17.40. The journey takes about two hours. We have the community mini bus for meeting foot passengers, or get into a group and car share with others from your church. Book with Orkney Ferries, for cars and foot passengers.

What will we do all day? **Morning worship** will be at 11.30, to allow everyone to settle and greet one another. After worship we will have our picnics - do bring your own lunch with you although there will be tea and coffee available. Then there will be about 2 hours and the chance to see a bit of Stronsay - those able, might walk to the **Vat of Kirbister**, or get to **Rothiesholm Beach**. There is also the chance to visit the **Heritage Centre**, which is fascinating, and to see the restored tidal toilets! The mini bus and cars will get us about, but anyone wanting to just relax can stay put at the Kirk. The **community garden** is right next door. At 15.30 we will regroup and enjoy a **Songs of Praise** with scones and home bakes, which will be provided. Then back to the village and another look about before getting to the pier for the ferry. We'll all be full of fresh air when we return to Kirkwall!

There is a thought to try to have two joint services a year for the parish - one in the winter months on Mainland and a visit to an island in the summer. There are obvious logistical challenges for everyone, but it is worth a try! Picking a date has been tricky and school holidays may not be the best time? We shall see. The joy of being together was something very positive that came out of the Service of Union two years ago.

See you on 2nd August?

Who's Who in the Parish - Marlyn Firth

From Religious Education Teacher to Funeral Celebrant - Marlyn tells her story.

Marlyn, are you an Orkney Lass?

'Through and through and a proud Orcadian at that. I was born and brought up in Kirkwall and my family had Cathedral connections. As children, all five of us attended Sunday School and my mum, Leslie Davidson, enjoyed attending Young Wives, was a Sunday School Teacher, and thirty years ago, she was one of the founding members of The St Magnus Cathedral Friendship Group.'



What took you away from Orkney?

'Like many young people, I left to study. I had applied to study Social Work and Religious Studies and was accepted for both. I chose Religious Studies at Edinburgh University, spending four years there before moving to Aberdeen for teacher training, having decided I wanted to become a Religious and Moral Education (RME) teacher. The summer I came home, Peter and I got married. Unfortunately, Peter became very ill not long afterwards, so we spent time in Aberdeen before returning home and adjusting to our new life together.'

After that unplanned start to married life, how easy was it to find a teaching post for Religious Studies?

'Jim Anderson, who worshipped at the Cathedral and was Director of Education, had been in touch with me during Peter's hospital stay, offering support, and had shared that there would be RME teaching work for me when I was ready, and he kept to that. I became an itinerant RME teacher across the North Isles and Hoy and then took up a post at Stromness Academy.'

How did teaching RME change, or did you take on different challenges?

'Teaching RME was challenging, but I felt that supporting pupils to learn about the range of beliefs and cultural practices which people have was important aspects of citizenship. So many of us leave Orkney and being aware of religious and cultural diversity equips us with knowledge, which in turn supports understanding of the wide range of people we encounter as we move beyond our island shores.'

During my time at Stromness Academy I moved into Guidance, which is all about supporting young people. I had been a Registration Teacher and when you are meeting pupils first thing every morning, you soon pick up on their concerns and worries, and you quickly realise just how complex life is for many. So, from being a Registration Teacher it was a natural move into Guidance. Guidance is about supporting well-being in all areas of a youngster's life, advocating for them to get the right help at the right time. I absolutely loved my Guidance work, moving up a step in 2006 to become Guidance Manager at Stromness Academy – what a privilege.'

You said you were in Stromness for twenty-six years - what happened next?

'I moved to Kirkwall Grammar School in 2017. It was closer to home so no more challenging winter commute! It is also a much larger school, which meant more responsibilities. It was a non-teaching post and child protection, safeguarding and wellbeing were significant components of the role. Orkney is a wonderful place to live, but our young people are exposed to the same challenges that young people across the country experience. I have also been truly fortunate: over the last two years, I was released from Kirkwall Grammar School to be part of an Education Scotland Team, training teachers to become Guidance Teachers. This has been an unforgettable highlight of my career.'

Marlyn, you are very newly retired, but in no way are you stopping. You have trained as a Funeral Celebrant - have you other plans too?

'Growing up, Guiding was a huge part of my life and my daughters and I have all travelled internationally through Guiding. Although nothing is planned, I would like to travel, perhaps incorporating some volunteering abroad into that. Two years ago I undertook a Funeral Celebrant's course. It was amongst the hardest training that I have ever undertaken, but very rewarding. As a Funeral Celebrant I can do faith and non-faith based funerals and I have been privileged to undertake a number of both types of services. Spending time with the bereaved, supporting them during their time of loss and planning together a funeral service that honours their loved one, is a role that I look forward to developing further. I am also looking forward to being more involved with Orkney Voices as I have been a part-time member so far. I love the writing that the group do, I love their passion for Orkney dialect, and their creative skills are second to none!

I am excited about the next chapter - there is so much that I want to do in retirement!

Your life has been very full, and far from straight-forward. How have you coped?

'Faith has been threaded through my journey - it has just always been there. It has been a comfort and a stimulus, and I know that God is at work. My husband, Peter, and my three children Sarah, Shona and Marcus have walked with me, always. As a member of the East Mainland congregation, I also feel surrounded by people within Holm, Deerness, Tankerness and Toab who support each other, care for each other, pray for each other and look out for each other – what a blessing!'

Join Our Autumn Reading Group

This September, we are continuing the ecumenical reading group on-line and would welcome anyone looking for a fresh voice and inspiration to step out in faith. We'll be reading Rewilding the Church by Steve Aisthorpe — a book which encourages Christians to be led by the Spirit and find a capacity way beyond imagination.

Whether you're a seasoned book group participant or simply curious, you're welcome to join the conversation. Together, we'll look for inspiration in the ecological concept of rewilding, an approach to the environment that allows nature to break free from the dulling effects of strategic control and bring wonder back into our lives.

Please contact **Rev Julia Meason** at JMeason@churchofscotland.org.uk or **Stuart Little** at sgliddle123@gmail.com, if you'd like to be part of our group. We'll start on Thursday 24 September at 7 pm and will be meeting fortnightly on Zoom.

Let's read, think, pray, and imagine what might happen if we put less faith in our strategies and plans, which inevitably depend on our own capabilities and resources, and allow the Spirit to lead us beyond our capacity to imagine.

Could you, or someone in your congregation, be a pen friend?

Pen friend? Well, an email friend! Diane is 70, lives alone in Kirkcaldy and her interests are mainly church and family. She is just back from a three-month volunteering trip to Iona, so she has lots to chat about to a new email friend. If you know someone who might benefit from a regular correspondence with a Lowlander, please get in touch with Julia for further details. Thank you. JMeason@churchofscotland.org.uk

From a Manse

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

What do the Cairns' dig, the beach at Glimps Holm and the parish of Orkney, all have in common?
Aside from all being in Orkney?

At the last open day for the Cairns dig in South Ronaldsay, ahead of their closure, we enjoyed hearing about the multiple layers of buildings from different ages and eras that had been uncovered and we found it fascinating to hear how, what one generation had built was re-purposed by the next generation and found a new lease of life.

At the beach at Glimps Holm, our old Labrador can get into the sea for a reinvigorating swim. That means we're there often and each time we come back, we notice the bit that was sandy is stoney – or vice versa – while the number of Groatie Buckies fluctuates dramatically!

The single parish of Orkney is also something that looks very different from how things once were, and all the changes brought about can take a bit of getting used to.

But the archaeological dig and the beach at Glimps Holm (or anywhere) remind us that nothing stays the same.

Not even the Church.

The Church of Scotland motto is 'Semper Reformanda' – 'Always Re-forming'. The pace of change right now and the sheer volume of changes, can feel overwhelming. But we need to take heart from the dig – and trust that what we're doing now will help future generations to build on the foundations of faith laid until now. We also need to trust that the Creator of tides and seashores, who holds all creation in the palm of his hand, knows what we don't. And that He can do what is beyond our imagining. Even with us. Hallelujah!

The Very Rev Susan Brown, Locum Minister at St Magnus Cathedral in July.

Westray Kirk's renovations

Rev Iain MacDonald told us about the renovations to the Kirk last month in 'From A Manse', and sent some photos. Unfortunately we didn't have room then for the pictures but we can put that right this time. So if you are heading out to Westray for a day, for fish and chips, or to see if the puffins have gone yet, make sure to stop and admire the Kirk!

